

---

Tuesday, June 22, 2010  
CONTACT: John Dipko, Communications Director, 608-266-6753  
On the Web: <http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwd/news.htm>

## **Secretary Gassman: Opportunity Grants Preparing Skilled Workforce for 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

### ***In Eau Claire, State Labor Secretary highlights efforts to assist workers***

EAU CLAIRE – Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman said today that Governor Jim Doyle's workforce agenda is preparing individuals for skilled jobs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and his Opportunity Grants program represents one way this vision is being realized.

"Opportunity Grants provide a means for those in low-wage jobs to build their skills and move toward rewarding careers in high-growth industries," Secretary Gassman said. "Helping workers gain the skills they need to succeed in today's labor market will be vital as Wisconsin continues its recovery from the worst national economic times since the Great Depression."

During a visit to the Health Education Center of Chippewa Valley Technical College, Secretary Gassman highlighted the \$1.5 million Opportunity Grant program, which provides grants of up to \$1,000 a year for workers in low-wage jobs to get technical college training and help them begin career paths to jobs in high-growth areas, such as advanced manufacturing and healthcare. The funds are administered through Wisconsin's 11 regional workforce development boards. To date, close to 300 Opportunity Grant recipients have been enrolled in the program statewide.

In the region serving Eau Claire, the West Central Workforce Development Board has awarded 35 Opportunity Grants and plans to award another 42. Most of the recipients are pursuing careers in health care, including jobs as nurses. In the West Central region, registered nurses currently earn on average nearly \$55,000 a year. Employment projects show 150 openings per year for registered nurses, both new and replacement positions as vacancies occur.

The Opportunity Grants program is part of a nearly \$6 million worker training package that Governor Doyle announced in 2009.

Applicants must be at least 18 years of age and employed, but with earnings below 200 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines, and otherwise ineligible for financial aid. The annual household income limit would be \$29,140 for a family of two, \$36,620 for a family of three, and \$44,100 for a family of four. Applicants must have a high school diploma or the equivalent. Up to \$1,000 will be provided for tuition, fees, books and supplies. Eligible areas of study are those identified by the regional boards as high demand occupations, such as health care, advanced manufacturing, biotechnology and energy.

The grants will cover short-term training, enabling individuals to earn certificates or degrees. The grant program also includes registered apprenticeships in high-demand occupations. In addition to the grants, individuals can receive up to \$250 to cover the cost of tools and uniforms, exam fees, transportation and child care. Individuals should apply for grants through their regional workforce development boards or local Job Centers. For Job Center locations, go to [JobCenterOfWisconsin.com](http://JobCenterOfWisconsin.com), or call, 888-258-9966. Contact information for the boards can be found at [http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwdwia/PDF/wda\\_list.pdf](http://dwd.wisconsin.gov/dwdwia/PDF/wda_list.pdf).